Letter from Taizé

Bimonthly 3.50 FF 1 February-March 1996

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Translated into 58 languages (including 23 Asian and 7 African ones), this letter was written by Brother Roger for the eighteenth European meeting of young adults, held this year in Wroclaw, Poland. It will be reflected on during the INTERCONTINENTAL MEETINGS OF YOUNG ADULTS that will take place each week in Taizé throughout 1996, bringing together young people from the East and West of Europe as well as from other continents. This letter was partly inspired by a time spent by Brother Roger and several other brothers in SOUTH AFRICA in May 1995.

Choose to Love

LETTER 1996

Like an almond tree that blossoms at the first hint of spring, the deserts of the heart burst into flower when a breath of trusting wafts across them.[1]

Borne forward by this breeze,[2] who would not wish to alleviate human suffering and trials?

Even when our feet stumble along a stony path, who would not wish to put these Gospel words into practice in their life: "Whatever you do for the least, the most destitute, you are doing for me, Christ"?[3]

A century after Christ, a believer wrote: "Clothe yourself in cheerfulness... Cleanse your heart of harmful sadness and you will live for God."[4]

Whoever lives for God chooses to love. Making such a choice one's own calls for unfailing vigilance.

A heart determined to love can radiate goodness without end. Its great concern is to relieve the torments of others nearby and far away.

Whoever lives for God glimpses this extraordinary reality: all of us are inhabited by a presence, that presence with which Christ comes to suffuse our lives. Before his resurrection he assured us of this: "I will send you the Holy Spirit, who will remain with you always."[5] Not just for a few fleeting moments, but for ever.

For us today, Christ Jesus is still what he was for his disciples when he lived on earth.[6] Christ becomes our life.[7] It is up to us to open our hearts to him just as they are.

And then one of the secrets of the Gospel is revealed: everything in our present and future existence depends upon the trust we place in Christ and in the Holy Spirit.

1 In May 1995, a meeting of young adults in South Africa made it possible to understand better the beautiful hope which is arising in that country. Even with very little, women, men and young people in South Africa can already accomplish more than they ever thought they could for justice and equality.

2 Beginning in about the 1970s, a breakdown of spiritual values began to occur in the Western world and a void was created. A void can be filled up with many different things, even the strangest ideas. In those years, social upheavals were sometimes so violent that they wounded the consciousness of some Christians. So many final judgements were passed, so much harshness expressed. This pressure even caused some people to stop believing in the worth of the life they had been living up to that point. At that time we said in Taizé: it is not for Christians to be "masters of worry"; they are "servants of trust." And so the idea of undertaking a "pilgrimage of trust on earth" was born.

3 See Matthew 25,40.

4 Hermas, second century.

5 See John 14,16 and 16,7.

6 See Hebrews 13,8 and Matthew 28,20.

7 See Galatians 2,20 and Colossians 3,3-4.

If an inner fog were to make us drift far away from the humble trust of faith,[8] Christ does not abandon us for all that. No one is excluded from his love... nor from his forgiveness, nor from his presence.

And if discouragement and even doubts arise within us,[9] Christ does not love us any the less. He is there, lighting up the way... And his call rings out ceaselessly: "Come, follow me!"[10]

Following him with a steadfast heart does not mean lighting fireworks that flare up brightly and then go out just as quickly.

The trusting of faith requires clear-sightedness. How could we ever cast another person into confusion by exaggerating our own faith? If faith became a spiritual pretension it would lead us nowhere; it would ultimately extinguish the mystical longing of our soul.

Torments brought on by memories of a recent or distant past can hold back the gentle breeze of a trust. The Gospel suggests that we not look back,[11] that we not linger over our failures, over what has wounded the depths of our being.

Endless discussions with ourselves can clutter our being and keep peace of heart far away. When we are beset by conflicting impressions, in order to safeguard an inner joy, it can happen that we find the boldness to repeat to ourselves: "Do not let my darkness speak to me!"

Daring to pray, daring to sing to Christ until we are joyful and serene...[12] Not with just any kind of joy, but with that joy which comes straight from the wellsprings of the Gospel.

So often we do not know how to pray![13] But "the Holy Spirit comes to help us in our weakness."[14] The Spirit inspires and sustains our prayer more than we realize, re-creating an inner unity when we are scattered or fragmented within. And we come to understand that there is no inner unity without peace of heart.

During his earthly life, Jesus prayed and his face was transfigured by light.[15] Imploring, he also prayed with tears.[16]

In all of us God accomplishes miracles, a healing of the soul. With wonder, we respond in the spirit of praise. It is up to us, then, to leave a "harmful sadness" behind by casting worry, anguish and fear into the crucible of prayer.[17] And the Gospel's joy, the spirit of praise, will always require an inner decision on our part, one that is renewed at every moment.

In the presence of God's infinite compassion, our innermost being is seized and becomes able to glimpse a road that leads to the holiness of Christ.[18]

8 For a person devoid of instruction as well as for the most cultivated one, faith remains a humble trust in Christ, in the Holy Spirit. The call of the Gospel is received first and foremost in the heart, in other words in the deepest part of our being.

9 Doubt can arise in anybody's life. But there is nothing alarming about doubt. Even when Jesus was on earth, some of those closest to him doubted. A believer said to him, "I believe...," in other words "I trust you," but then immediately added these words: "Come and help my unbelief" (Mark 9,24).

10 Mark 10,21.

11 See Luke 9,62.

12 See Ephesians 5,19-20.

13 In order to pray, sometimes just a single word or a few words are enough. Some Eastern Christians are very attached to the prayer of the Name of Jesus; there are people who express the fullness of a communion simply by repeating the name Jesus again and again. There are short prayers, sung many times over, which are able to dispel dark clouds: "Jesus your light is shining within us; let not my doubts and my darkness speak to me; let my heart always welcome your love" (adapted from a prayer written by Saint Augustine in about the year 400). Some people constantly repeat this age-old prayer: "Let nothing trouble you; God alone suffices." Or they pray to Christ: "In you peace of heart!" Some pray on their knees, others fold their hands or lift them up, or pray with their foreheads to the ground, like the disciples at the end of Luke's Gospel (see Luke 24,52).

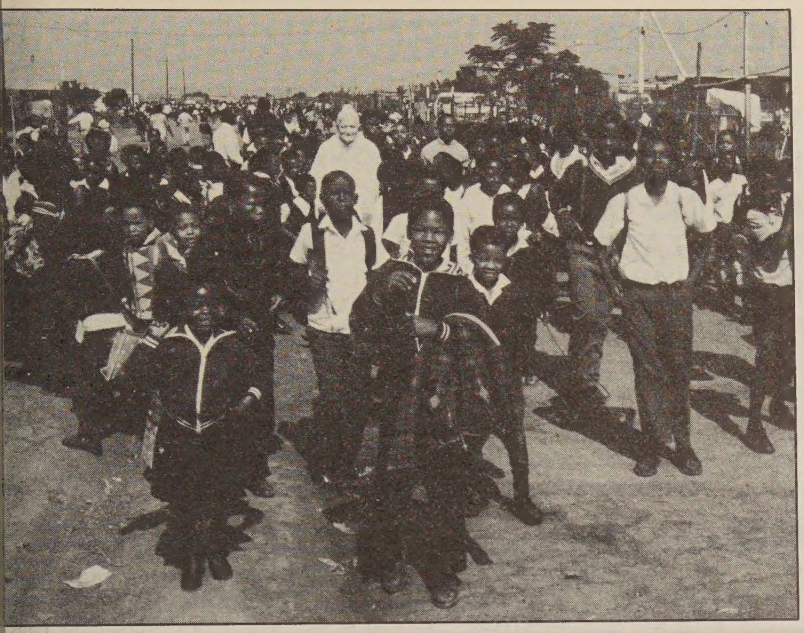
14 Romans 8,26.

15 See Luke 9,29.

16 See Hebrews 5,7. At the end of his life, Jesus let a prayer of confident trust rise to his lips, a prayer that we too can repeat: "Into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23,46), in other words: "Into your hands I entrust my entire life."

17 See Philippians 4,6-7 and 1 Peter 5,7.

18 So many people on earth radiate the holiness of Christ without realizing it and perhaps without even daring to believe it.



A meeting of young adults took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, in May 1995.

A message from President Mandela:
"It is a great joy for me to greet Brother Roger and the Taizé Community, who have been linked by bonds of friendship with so many young people in South Africa for a long time. I was touched to learn that all the bells at Taizé rang out on the day of my liberation from prison...
I urge the younger generation, who have an important role to play in building a new South Africa, to accept responsibility and not give in to impatience or hopelessness, so that they may be a beacon of hope for many young people throughout the world who are searching for ways of building trust in the human family..."

Supporting Families and Children

During the European meeting in Paris last year, no call for material sharing was launched. In 1995 the Taizé Community, from its own earnings, tried to contribute to the support of children of lepers and those whose parents have died of AIDS in Africa, as well as children from Bangladesh and the Northeast of Brazil. This support must be continued and broadened in the coming year.

In addition, another necessity has now arisen in South Africa.

For years now, young people from South Africa have been coming to Taizé, a few at a time, for a stay of several months. Many of them are from Soweto, that immense and very destitute city situated next to Johannesburg. In a part of Soweto where three thousand people live in dire poverty, a small community of sisters made up of seven women is doing all in its power to find food for the inhabitants of the district.

It is indispensable to help them, and so in 1995 the Taizé Community took charge of the life of one hundred families in Soweto. But that is so little that it is important to do more. That is why, in the *Letter from Taizé* distributed to those taking part in the European meeting in Poland, an appeal was made through "Operation Hope." Thinking about it, it would perhaps have been better not to have made that appeal. Why? Because every request for funds, even if made in order to help other people far from Taizé, is distasteful. And it is important for the Taizé Community to do all it can, by its work, to share with others and, in this particular case, to assume part of the responsibility that those women have taken on for three thousand poor people.

It is good to remember that the Taizé Community earns its living by its own work, accepting no gifts or donations for itself, absolutely nothing. The personal inheritances of the brothers are deposited in "Operation Hope" in order to help poor people across the world.

The community offers material assistance to those in need. It must also cover part of the expenses entailed by the welcome of the young in Taizé, as well as the repair of the buildings used for the welcome.

Letter from Taizé

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MESSAGES SENT TO TAIZÉ FOR THE EUROPEAN MEETING OF YOUNG ADULTS IN POLAND

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Brother Roger
Prior of the Taizé Community

Dear Brother,

For the eighteenth consecutive year, your community is inviting young adults, from 28 December 1995 to 1 January 1996, to a European meeting which represents a stage in the "pilgrimage of trust on earth." After many other cities, it will be held this year in Wroclaw, in a country of Eastern Europe.

Giving thanks to the Lord for the step undertaken by the young people who are responding to the invitation of your community, the Pope encourages them to continue tirelessly to meditate on the Gospel, through which they will discover Christ and learn to love him more. In the silence of prayer, the Lord communicates his love to them, so that they may be his witnesses, by the gift of themselves to their brothers and sisters, in order to participate together in the building up of the Body of Christ, which is the Church, and of Europe of the third millenium.

By the intercession of Our Lady, the Holy Father invokes upon those taking part in this meeting, upon the community which is animating it, as well as upon the parishes and families that are welcoming them, the Lord's blessing.

THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH, BARTHOLOMEOS OF CONSTANTINOPLE

From this historical See of Constantinople, we come toward you and we unite ourselves to you, for you are young people who are struggling, searching and hoping.

From the vantage-point of our position and the experience of past centuries, based on the reality that surrounds us and the love that warms our heart, an elderly man but one who is always young, we can assure you that all this is good.

Be sure, be absolutely confident of the love of God; go forward; respect yourselves and others; help discreetly the weak and wounded brothers and sisters of Jesus, without looking for any reward. The imperishable reward will come of itself; it will be marvellous; it will illuminate your life; it will strengthen your faith and it will transform your life, for you will inevitably become aware that the one God, a communion of three Persons, is love.

In this liturgy of love, you are living as children of God, by undertaking a pilgrimage towards the fulfillment of life and making the total gift of yourselves. Our ardent prayer is that you may accomplish this total offering of love by a courageous act and by the way you live, in order to share in the blessings which God has prepared for those who love him.

May the grace and the mercy of our incarnate Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ be with you all.

PATRIARCH ALEXIS OF MOSCOW

In addressing you, young Christians from different countries meeting in Wroclaw, at the very centre of Europe, where radical changes in the structure of life are occurring, I would like to underline that it depends precisely upon youth how Europe and the whole world will come into the third millenium after the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Like those who implemented the Beatitudes at the dawn of the Christian era, those whom Jesus Christ called "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world," you have to bring the light of Christ to the contemporary world, which unfortunately suffers from wars, from lack of understanding between people and from their unwillingness to find ways towards reconciliation. There are many tearful and hungry people in the world, who have nowhere to lay their head. We also know of the troubles of the young people of today, who have lost links with their parents and Churches and who often give themselves to the illusory world of narcotics or pseudo-religious sects; "they die in youth" (Job 36:14).

Our Lord Jesus Christ calls upon you, who follow His way and find joy in communion with Him in the Holy Spirit, to show your faith in deeds—to feed the hungry person, to call upon enemies to find reconciliation, to help the stray to find the true way in our Lord Jesus Christ.

May the God of peace be with you all!

THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS, MR BOUTROS BOUTROS GHALI

As every year, the Taizé Community, at the incentive of Brother Roger, fosters considerable enthusiasm and new momentum. It leads the youth of Europe to gather together and to proclaim their faith and confidence in the future.

In a world shaken by the convulsions of History, which questions itself about its values and where it is heading, this communion of youth is, above all, an act of hope.

In the name of the United Nations Organization and the whole of the international Community, I want to tell you how much my thoughts turn to you and accompany your beautiful gathering.

THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, DR GEORGE CAREY

My warmest greetings and prayers are with you as you gather in Wroclaw for the 18th Annual European Meeting.

As many of you know I have a very high regard for Taizé and its distinguished work for God. My visit in 1992 with 1000 young Anglicans remains a vivid and glorious memory as something which enlarged and deepened my own spiritual life. I was greatly encouraged too as I met with Brother Roger and heard him tell the story of Taizé, and by seeing the young people I had brought with me entering more fully into knowing God's love for them.

I believe that the task you are engaged in in this New Year is a vital one for the future of Europe and of the European Church.

Having visited Bosnia just before Christmas I was struck once more by the crucial need we have of finding new ways to make peace.

May God bless you and may you discover new depths of understanding and unity through your time together.

MEDITATING ON THE WORD
MARCH

These short readings proposed for reflection are taken from the midday prayer in Taizé. The reference shows where the text was taken from. Sometimes a longer reading is given, for those who wish to set the text in its context.

Rm 12:1-13

1 Fri Do not model yourselves on the pattern of this world, but let yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may discern the will of God.

Rm 8:1-11

2 Sat The One who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit living in you.

Mt 17:1-9

3 SUN At the transfiguration of Jesus, the disciples fell face down to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid."

Gn 28:10-22

4 Mon The Lord says: I am with you, I will watch over you wherever you go. I will not abandon you before accomplishing what I have promised you.

1 K 8:22-40

5 Tue Solomon prayed: Listen, Lord, forgive and act; deal with every person according to all they do, since you know their heart — you alone know the heart of everyone.

Rm 12:3-13

6 Wed Paul writes: When you give, give generously, from the heart; when you do works of mercy, do so with joy.

Rv 3:7-8

7 Thu Thus says the Lord: Though you are not very strong, you have kept my Word, and now I have opened before you a door that no one can close.

1 K 19:1-8

8 Fri When Elijah was discouraged, an angel of God touched him and said, "Get up and eat, or the journey will be too long for you." So he got up and ate and drank, and, strengthened by that food, he walked until he reached the mountain of God.

Jude 20-21

9 Sat Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

Jn 4:5-42

10 SUN Jesus said: Anyone who drinks the water I give will never be thirsty again. The water I give them will become a spring of water within them, welling up to eternal life.

Jb 19:23-27

11 Mon Job said: I know that my redeemer lives. From my flesh I shall look on God, and the one on whom I look will be no stranger.

Ps 1

12 Tue The one who finds his joy in God's law is like a tree planted by the water, which bears its fruit in season and whose leaves never wither.

1 Jn 4:16-21

13 Wed This is the command Christ gave us: whoever loves God must also love their brother.

Mt 18:1-4

14 Thu Jesus said: Truly, I tell you, the one who makes himself humble like a little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Mk 1:1-15

15 Fri Jesus said: The kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the good news of the Gospel.

Ps 4

16 Sat Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. You have set me free from my distress.

Ep 5:8-14

17 SUN You are light in the Lord. Live as children of light; for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.

Pr 4:18-27

18 Mon The path of the upright is like the light of dawn, whose brightness increases to the full light of day.

Lk 6:20-23

19 Tue St JOSEPH
Looking at his disciples, Jesus said: Happy are you who are poor, the kingdom of God is yours.

2 Co 5:1-7

20 Wed We advance by faith, not by sight.

Ws 1:1-3

21 Thu Seek God in simplicity of heart; for he reveals himself to those who do not mistrust him.

Lk 6:27-35

22 Fri Jesus said: Treat others as you would like them to treat you.

Ws 3:1-9

23 Sat Like gold tested in a furnace, God purifies those who love him. Those who are faithful to him will dwell with him in love.

Jn 11:1-45

24 SUN Jesus said: I am the resurrection. The one who believes in me shall live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.

Lk 1:26-38

25 Mon Mary said to the angel: I am the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.

2 Co 4:7-12

26 Tue We carry the treasure of God's glory in earthen vessels so that it may be quite clear that the radiance comes from God, not from us.

Jn 15:9-17

27 Wed Jesus said: There is no greater love than giving one's life for those one loves.

2 Co 12:1-10

28 Thu Paul writes: God said to me: My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Ws 11:21-26

29 Fri Lord, you are merciful to all because you are almighty. You close your eyes to people's sins so that they can repent.

Jn 14:1-3

30 Sat Jesus said: Do not let your hearts be troubled. You trust in God, trust also in me.

Zc 9:9-10

31 SUN PALM SUNDAY
Cry out and rejoice, for your king is approaching. He is just and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey.

JOHANNINE HOURS

ISAIAH 6,1-8

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

The God of the Bible often reveals himself in situations on the fringes of human life. But one day, at the very heart of the life of God's people, a man had a vision. During a liturgy in the great Temple of Jerusalem, Isaiah saw the Lord as a majestic sovereign surrounded by his courtiers. God thus used familiar images to depict his holiness. And as always, the experience of holiness was something both attractive and frightening—the encounter with a Beauty that unsettles human beings by calling them out of their routines.

Isaiah's fear is translated into a feeling of unworthiness. "A man of unclean lips," he is not able to add his voice to the praises of the heavenly host. But admitting his weakness is enough, for God longs so deeply to communicate his holiness that he searches for the smallest sign of openness in his partner. The fire of God's holiness is a burning coal that can purify, a flame of forgiveness that makes a human being able to welcome God. With his lips now clean, Isaiah can go towards others in God's name and bring to his wayward contemporaries a beautiful and unsettling Word. Far from being a movement of separation or a treasure to be protected, holiness in the Bible is essentially an energy of communion, a "going towards" that makes those it encounters messengers of an unimaginable love.

- Do I discover God's presence just as much in ordinary life with others, for example in that of my local Church, as in exceptional experiences?
- Do I sometimes feel that I am not "up to the mark," not able to accomplish what God expects of me? How then can I remember that "whatever God asks, at the same time he gives"?
- What is God asking me to communicate to others, and by what means? Where can I find the strength to do it?

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

APRIL

These short readings proposed for reflection are taken from the midday prayer in Taizé. The reference shows where the text was taken from. Sometimes a longer reading is given, for those who wish to set the text in its context.

Is 30:15
1 Mon The Lord says: Your salvation is in returning and rest, your strength lies in calm and trust.

Ep 4:1-7
2 Tue With all humility, gentleness and patience, bear with one another in love. Take every care to maintain the unity of the Spirit by the bond of peace.

Mi 6:1-8
3 Wed The Lord says: What have I done to you, my people? How have I made you tired of me? Answer me! Remember your journey and how the Lord acted with saving justice.

Jn 13:1-15
4 Thu Jesus said: Love one another just as I have loved you. By this, everyone will recognize you as my disciples.

Ph 2:1-11
5 Fri GOOD FRIDAY
Taking the nature of a servant, Christ became as human beings are. And he humbled himself still further, remaining faithful to the point of death, and death on a cross. Therefore God has exalted him, and has given him the name that is above all other names.

Ep 2:13-18
6 Sat Christ is our peace. He has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between the peoples and reconciled them to God, through the cross. In his own person, he has destroyed hatred.

Col 3:1-4
7 SUN EASTER DAY
You have been raised with Christ, so set your hearts on things above, not on earthly things. For you have died and now the life you have is hidden with Christ in God.

Ep 4:17-32
8 Mon Let yourselves be made new in the attitude of your minds to be clothed with the new self, which is created to be like God in justice and in holiness of the truth.

Jr 22:1-3
9 Tue The Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue those who are wronged from the hands of their oppressors.

Ba 5:1-9
10 Wed Take off your garment of sorrow and distress, and put on for ever the beauty of God's glory. For he will guide you in joy, with the mercy and saving justice that come from him.

Mt 13:44-46
11 Thu Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field that someone has found; he hides it again, and in his joy sells everything he has and buys that field.

Lm 3:22-26
12 Fri God's compassion is renewed every morning; his faithfulness is great. It is good to await in silence the salvation of the Lord.

Ep 5:14-20
13 Sat Let yourselves be filled by the Spirit. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.

1 P 1:3-9
14 SUN Though you have not seen Christ Jesus, you love him. Still without seeing him you believe in him and so are already filled with a joy so glorious it cannot be described.

Mt 14:22-33
15 Mon Jesus came towards his disciples, walking on the water, and they were terrified; but at once he said to them: Courage! It is I. Do not be afraid.

Ezk 34:1-16
16 Tue The Lord says: I will take care of my flock. I shall look for the lost sheep, bring back the strays, bandage the injured and strengthen the sick. I shall watch over the one that is healthy and strong.

Hos 6:3-6
17 Wed Let us strive to know the Lord; that he will come is as certain as the dawn. He will come to us like the rain of springtime upon the earth.

Ga 2:15-21
18 Thu Paul writes: The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Lk 17:3-4
19 Fri Jesus said: If your brother wrongs you seven times in a day and seven times comes back to you and says, "I repent", forgive him.

Hos 14:2-9
20 Sat The Lord says: I will cure my people of their disloyalty, I shall love them with all my heart. I hear them and watch over them.

Lk 24:13-35
21 SUN Having recognised the Risen Christ, the disciples of Emmaus said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Si 2:1-9
22 Mon You who revere the Lord, wait for his mercy. Do not turn aside from him.

Jn 12:20-30
23 Tue Jesus said: In truth, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains only a single grain. But if it dies it yields a big harvest.

Is 42:10-17
24 Wed The Lord says: I shall lead my people by a road that is unknown to them. I shall turn the darkness into light before them.

Mk 16:15-20
25 Thu St MARK
Jesus sent out his disciples, saying: Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation.

2 Co 5:16-21
26 Fri St. Paul writes: In the name of Christ we appeal to you to be reconciled to God.

Mi 4:1-3
27 Sat Days will come when many peoples will come and say, "Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, so that he may teach us his ways." And they will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into bill-hooks.

Jn 10:1-10
28 SUN Jesus said: I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

Ga 6:1-10
29 Mon Bear each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.

Zp 3:14-18a
30 Tue Your God is with you. He will quiet you with his love, he will dance with joy for you.

JOHANNINE HOUR

COLOSSIANS 1,24-2

Johannine hours are meant as a way seeking God in silence and prayer in t midst of our daily life. During the cou of a day, take an hour or so to read t Bible passage with the short comme tary and to reflect on the questio s which follow. Afterwards, a group 3 to 10 people can meet to share wh they have discovered and perhaps for time of prayer.

In this passage, Saint Paul situ ates his call as an apostle in th context of God's great project (th "mystery") to bring the enti universe into the fullness of the c vine communion. God does this b sending his Son into the worl even to those who were not con sciously waiting for him (the Ge tiles). This unbelievable act of lov is the climax of all the generou acts by which God attempted t communicate with humanity ov the course of centuries (v.25b).

Since God's plan centers on communion of intelligent person the knowledge of it that they hav is a necessary part of this pla God wishes to "reveal" the myste (v.27a). As a consequence, Pa and his fellow-workers have t "proclaim" to and "instruct" people among other things, the Gospel a form of "wisdom," a conscious way of leading one's life so as t grow toward the fullness of a com munion in Christ (v.28).

But the apostle teaches first an foremost by the life he leads in th steps of Christ. In the image of hi Lord, he gives his life for hi brothers and sisters, thus lettin Christ's passion put its mark on hi own existence. Paul knows that h can add nothing to Christ's suffe ings, but he also knows that the e forts and struggles of the ministe of the Gospel are in full continuit with these sufferings. They are th repercussions of it throughout his tory, in order to allow the Body c Christ to grow to its full stature. An Paul is aware that what enable him to keep going in the midst c his difficulties is the power of th resurrection, itself a gift fro Christ.

- Am I familiar with examples c shared suffering that become source of joy? Why?
- Do I view Bible history as some thing that concerns me person ally? What texts, what intuition help me to situate my own on going life in the context of God' universal plan?
- How can we grow in a relation ship with Christ? How can w help others to grow?

To live as people who are reconciled ! Discovering a communion of love with Christ leads us not to remain isolated.[19]

In that communion which is the Body of Christ, his Church, God will never impose impossible conditions on us. Where then would his love be? As soon as there is the simple desire for God, for Christ and for the Gospel, even if we do not understand very much, faith has already begun its work in us.[20]

When the Church welcomes with great simplicity,[21] when it is concerned to love and understand the mystery of every human being, it becomes what it is at its most transparent, the light of a love.[22]

Today, more than we realize, a great many young people aspire to a communion in God.[23] The lives of many of them are rooted in a clear trust in Christ. But a question remains: "Why are multitudes of young people in vast regions of the world still indifferent to the trust of faith and absent from worship in the churches?"[24]

In all of us there arise these pressing questions: is it possible to let a single day go by without searching with all our soul for the reason why so many young people are absent? And in the face of this situation, attentive to simplicity, what can we undertake without a moment's delay, sustained by that communion of love which is the Body of Christ, his Church?

Are we sufficiently aware that it is our vocation to live as people who are reconciled? Today this is becoming an urgent necessity. It makes it possible for the Gospel to be lived out in its first freshness.[25] On the one hand, to live as people who are reconciled always gives renewed meaning to the communion between Christians. And on the other, Christians can be made more aware of the fact that, in secularized societies, reconciliation is just as vital as daily bread.

Whoever consents to such a vocation radiates the Gospel in peace of heart, not only among believers but towards non-believers as well.[26]

In the face of the void left by the departure of so many Christians, the Holy Spirit causes a tiny flame to flare up. It is the wonder of a love. Such a love frees us from our fears. It alone draws us out, leading us far, as far as reconciliation.

This flame can be very faint at times, but faith sheds its light even in the dark corners of our being. And the fire of the Holy Spirit comes rushing in. This fire is mercy.

A ministry in the Church has no other aim than to try and open gates of mercy.

When the young are able to join in the ebrations of a local Christian community, a rish, they renew hope in the older generations. any people are looking for parish communities be places of prayer where the mystery of God immediately perceptible and not smothered too many words. Would it be possible to epare a prayer in a church, for example on at st two Friday evenings a month, a prayer that simple but characterized by the beauty of nging ? A space of silence in the middle of the ayer opens the way to a communion with hrist and the Holy Spirit (one period of ence is enough; too many become tedious). In cularized societies, it is good too for our omes to give people a glimpse of an invisible resence by a few symbols of Christ. In one oom we can set up a corner for prayer, how-ver small it may be, with an icon, a candle...

A seventeen-year-old boy wrote to Taizé ne day: "Before the age of 13 or 14, I never ad the opportunity to ask myself questions bout faith. Today, I am searching. I tried to ead the Bible, but I found it hard to under-tand. Two or three times I took part in a ucharist and I was more moved than I had ver been in my entire life. I felt I had been ouched by God's grace. I started to believe rom that moment on and, one day, I felt the eed to speak with someone who could help ne to understand the faith."

21 Simplicity, whether in the life of the Church or in our personal lives, is never an ice-cold austerity; it never entails glumness. The spirit of simplicity shines out in serene joy, in cheerfulness of heart. Simplifying invites us to arrange what little we have with harmony.

22 If those called to speak about the Gospel or to pray aloud in front of others could say to themselves: "May your prayer and your words never contain a threat in the name of God!" God is love. He does not make use of fear to impose himself upon human beings. Even when Christ was mistreated, he did not threaten anyone (see 1 Peter 2,23).

23 Some of the young are increasingly attentive to prayer and to the wellsprings of the faith. Many aspire to an inner unity and to peace of heart. They are eager to participate with others in a prayer where a contemplative dimension is not lacking.

24 For some young people, the choice to take part in the life of a parish or congregation is not self-evident. That is why it is essential for them to be given challenging responsibilities to communicate Christ to others, and for their elders to take this collaboration seriously.

25 A Gospel freshness is incompatible with polemics that leave behind a taste of bitterness and self-righteousness.

26 Experiencing an inner emptiness, some people wonder: "But where is God?" (Psalm 42,3). And yet, does not the Risen Christ remain alongside every person, even those who are unaware of him (see 1 Peter 3,18-20)? Is not every human being visited by the Spirit of God (see Joel 3,1)?

The human family will know a future of peaceful trust as long as there are men, women and children on earth who love, pray and dare to take risks by giving their lives for Christ and the Gospel.[27]

But there are people whose failures and disappointments lead them to believe that it is not possible to change society. Their main concern is their own immediate future. And so this grave question arises: how can we go forward when our own future is blocked ?[28]

It is easy to understand that choosing to love means also paying attention to one of the trials of our day, unemployment. How, then, can we strive to create viable living conditions for the excluded and for the most destitute?[29]

And if struggle and contemplation are both Gospel realities, are we not called to give our lives to alleviate human suffering ?

So when the life of a child is undermined by broken relationships, who will know how to remain alongside him or her with infinite discretion and kindness ? Who will help such children find their way through the anguish of abandonment, and the anxiety of not knowing that they are loved for what they are ?

If our steps were to become heavy and sluggish, would we still be able to discern the desert flower? It blossoms at sunrise, in the hours of constant new beginnings, when a gentle breeze of trusting enables us to go forward and to go a long way on the road of an inexhaustible goodness.[30]

One of the ultimate meanings of our existence is to love life on earth and at the same time to long for a beyond, for a life that will never end.[31]

In our societies, which are so complex at times,[32] the Gospel lets light shine through and it tells us, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be as well."[33]

Where is our treasure ? It consists in clothing ourselves in joy and in peace of heart. And all around us, life will become beautiful.

27 Many would like to prepare themse to assume responsibilities with a view to ing part in the building up of a Europe wh is peaceful and reconciled, where toleranc held in high esteem. Those who commit their energies to fostering reconciliation opening up incalculable perspectives for future of the European family. And si young people from other continents com Taizé, too, they ask the same question rega ing the places where they live.

28 They are not necessarily indifferent the future of the human family. Many them are affected by the suffering of peo nearby or far away. But in their eyes, to and make society better would mean risk disillusionment right from the start, so th feel that it is better not to try, and pre instead to remain uninvolved.

29 At this period in history, many you believers are aware that faith does not tu them into people who are irresponsible. Th are trying to make the earth a better pla among other things through humanitar initiatives, by taking on responsibilities th may be very simple but are quite down- earth. There is an unprecedented awakeni of the Christian conscience with regard suffering across the world. Close to the f gotten of the earth—the excluded, the d titute, the persecuted—more and mo people are looking for solutions.

30 Happy those who live in the trusting faith; they will see God! How will they him? Like Mary who, attentive, "kept eve thing in her heart" (Luke 2,19.51) and s God with her inward eye.

31 See Philippians 1,21-25.

32 Wherever we are on this earth, we belo to societies which are complex and sometim in turmoil. The Church has taken its place these societies, and so it too can be shaken. we remember that, in the Gospel, Christ t us, "Don't worry!" (see Matthew 6,25-34). It not an easy matter to put these words into pra tice in our lives! Not worrying never mea being naïve. Christ did not say, "Don't be cle sighted!" The Gospel invites us to use go judgement (see Matthew 10,16).

33 Matthew 6,21.

Jesus our peace, in your Gospel you assure us, "I will send you the Holy Spirit, who will remain in you for ever." So enable us to cast into the crucible of prayer all that keeps us far from your Spirit.

Jesus our peace, if it happens that we lose confidence, you, the Risen Christ, cause a tiny flame to flare up in us. This flame can be quite faint, but already faith sheds its light in our night; and God's fire, the Holy Spirit, comes rushing in.